

## PROVIDENCE INDUSTRIAL SITES



This report is jointly sponsored and funded as a planning tool by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission and the City of Providence. Commission activities are supported by state and local funds and by the Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. City funding was provided through the Mayor's Office of Community Development. It is issued as part of the program set forth in Rhode Island's "Historical Preservation Plan," first edition (1970).

The city and the state Historical Preservation Commission are jointly sponsoring a comprehensive historical survey of Providence. When complete, this planning study will include an overview report on the city as a whole and individual reports on several historic neighborhoods. Reports have been issued on South Providence and Elmwood; this Smith Hill report is the third in the series.

The Rhode Island Historical Society has made an invaluable contribution to the preparation of this report through the assistance of its staff and library.

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*This document was originally issued by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission in 1981.*

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*The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is your state agency for historical preservation. The Commission identifies and protects historic buildings, districts, and archaeological sites throughout the State of Rhode Island.*

#### **PLEASE NOTE**

Since the original publication:

- additional properties have been entered on the National Register
- some financial incentives referred to in these pages are no longer available
- some new financial incentives are available

For up-to-date information, contact:

- Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, [www.rihphc.state.ri.us](http://www.rihphc.state.ri.us)

Other resources:

- City of Providence, [www.providenceri.com](http://www.providenceri.com)
- Providence Preservation Society, [www.ppsri.org](http://www.ppsri.org)
- Rhode Island Historical Society, [www.rihs.org](http://www.rihs.org)

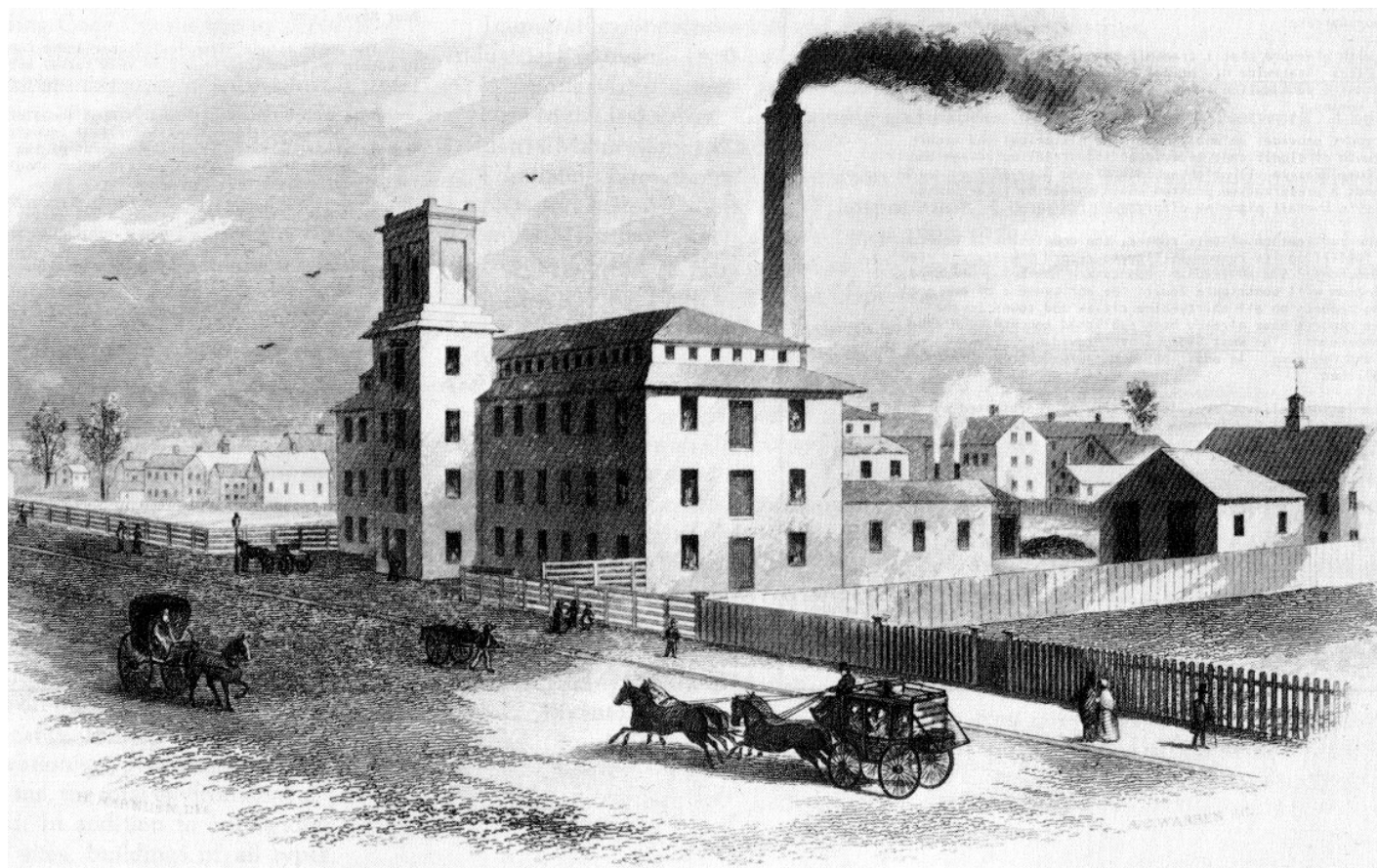
Cover: Nicholson File Company (1864, and later); Acorn Street; engraving

Title Page: The old Grant Mill (mid-19th century, demolished early 1900's); Carpenter Street. Typical features include an exterior stair tower, monitor roof broken by a clerestory window and stone walls.

# Providence Industrial Sites

## Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-6

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
**July 1981**





STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Old State House  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, R.I. 02903  
(401) 222-2678

July 8, 1981

The Honorable J. Joseph Garrahy, Governor  
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
State House  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Governor Garrahy:

It is with pleasure that I transmit herewith Providence Industrial Sites — Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-6, the thirty-fourth publication in the Statewide Historical Preservation Report series.

This report provides an analysis of the historical and architectural growth of significant individual industrial buildings and industrial complexes in all neighborhoods of the City of Providence and recommends a preservation program which should be incorporated into the city's overall planning effort.

With the publication of this report, the Commission is well on its way to fulfilling its responsibility to record the state's rich cultural resources. Six additional reports are now being prepared; their completion will contribute significantly toward the achievement of our goal of producing reports on all thirty-nine cities and towns in the state. Five reports have already been published concerning Providence neighborhoods: The West Side, South Providence, Elmwood, Smith Hill and Downtown. In addition, a citywide overview report will be published.

The Commission believes that its effort, as represented by this and other reports, will further the cause of historical preservation in Rhode Island.

Very sincerely,

Mrs. George E. Downing  
Chairman



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Old State House  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, R.I. 02903  
(401) 222-2678

July 8, 1981

The Honorable Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., Mayor  
The City of Providence  
25 Dorrance Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Mayor Cianci:

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission is pleased to submit in final published form this survey and report Providence Industrial Sites — Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-6.

This report provides an analysis of the historical and architectural growth of significant individual industrial buildings and industrial complexes in all neighborhoods of the City of Providence and recommends a preservation program which should be incorporated into the city's overall planning effort.

The product of detailed research and survey by Lisa Fink of the commission staff, it is truly a joint effort on the part of the City of Providence and the State commission. Moreover, the Mayor's Office of Community Development funds contributed significant financial support for the project.

It is the Commission's hope that this survey and publication will provide a planning tool for neighborhood and city preservation programs and serve as an academic and educational resource, useful in the study of local and state history. It is also hoped that economic development through re-use and rehabilitation of Providence's industrial buildings will be encouraged and that civic pride will be stimulated as residents become aware of the historical and visual environment in which they live.

Very truly yours,

Mrs. George E. Downing  
Chairman

## PREFACE

In 1968, the Rhode Island General Assembly established the Historical Preservation Commission, charging it with, among other duties, the task of developing a state preservation program following the guidelines of the National Historical Preservation Act of 1966 as administered by the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, United States Department of the Interior. Citizen members of the Commission appointed by the Governor; the chairman of the House and Senate Finance Committees of the General Assembly, the Director of the Department of Economic Development, the Director of the Department of Environmental Management, the Chief of the Division of Statewide Planning, and the State Building Code Commissioner serve as ex-officio members. The Director of the Department of Community Affairs has been appointed by the Governor as the State Historic Preservation Officer for Rhode Island.

The Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for conducting a statewide survey of historic sites and places from the survey recommending properties of local, state, or national significance for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places; administering federal grants-in-aid to Register properties for acquisition and development; and developing a state historical preservation plan. Additional duties include compiling and maintaining a State Register of Historic Places; assisting state and municipal agencies in the area of historical preservation planning by undertaking special project-review studies; and regulating archaeological exploration on state lands and under waters of state jurisdiction.

The Rhode Island Statewide Historical Survey, inaugurated in June 1969, has been designed to locate, identify, map, and report on buildings sites, areas, and objects of cultural significance. In line with the current movement among preservationists, planners, and architectural and social historians, the total environment of a survey area is considered. In addition to outstanding structures and historical sites, buildings of all types, periods, and styles which constitute the fabric of a community are recorded and evaluated. Presently, archeological resources are to be recorded in a separate survey.

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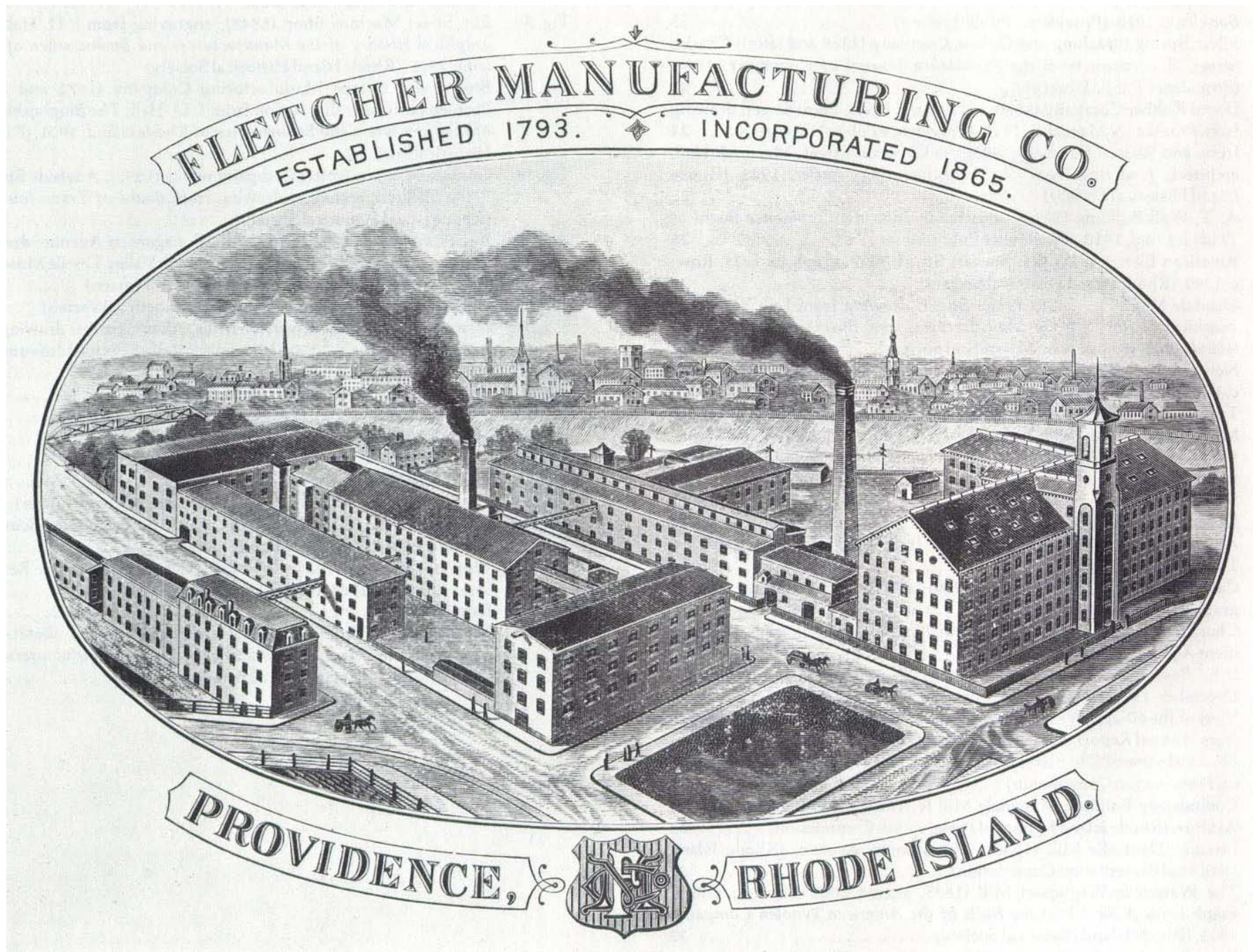
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Frontispiece: Fletcher Manufacturing Company (1844 and later); 47 Charles Street; illustration, 1887. Remaining buildings are the offices and warehouse (1869) shown in the left foreground.



## I. INTRODUCTION

This historical survey of industrial sites in Providence was undertaken for the city by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, with funds provided by the Commission from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior and the State of Rhode Island, and also by the Mayor's Office of Community Development. The long-range goal of the city and the state Preservation Commission in helping to fund this survey has been to undertake a project aimed at increasing awareness of the significance and potential of Providence industrial sites.

The Providence Industrial Sites Survey, inaugurated in January, 1979, covers significant individual industrial buildings and industrial complexes in all neighborhoods of the City of Providence. Engineering and industrial sites such as bridges, tunnels, and warehouses not connected with manufacturing are not covered in this report but are discussed in *Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites* by Gary Kulik and Julia Bonham. The Industrial Sites Survey is part of a broader survey program designed to document all of the city's historic areas and individual historic sites. Conducted by the Preservation Commission in cooperation with the Mayor's office over a period of several years, this project expands the coverage already provided by the landmark *College Hill* (first published in 1959) and by *West Side* (1976), *South Providence* (1978), and *Elmwood* (1979)—as well as *Smith Hill* (1980) and *Downtown* (1981). The present coordinated effort will eventually produce a publication giving a summary overview of the entire city.

To accomplish the goals of the project, several steps were necessary, including field survey, historical research, preparation of survey sheets, and a final survey report. This final report is divided into five sections: Location and physical features of Providence, Industrial Historical Analysis, Industrial Architectural Analysis, Re-use of Industrial Buildings, and Appendices.

The first section contains a brief sketch of the city's present size, location, and appearance and an outline of the industrial districts of the city.

The second section contains a history of Providence's industrial development based on the city's existing industrial landscape. Components include factories, warehouses connected with manufacturing, and power plants. Emphasis is placed on the conditions and events—physical, economic, and social—which contributed to the formation of this industrial landscape.

The third section contains a history of industrial building forms in Providence, based on extant structures. Illustrations help to provide an understanding of industrial building technology and architectural development.

The fourth section deals with the re-use of industrial buildings in Providence. Included in this section are recommendations for a preservation plan for the rehabilitation or re-use of industrial buildings.

In the appendices are explanations of the National Register of Historic Places, the grants-in-aid program, and the survey form of the Historical Preservation Commission. An inventory of noteworthy industrial structures and a glossary of industrial terms are also included.

Results of the survey and the report have been reviewed by city officials, local historians, knowledgeable area residents and the members and staff of the state Historical Preservation Commission. Copies of the survey sheets and maps are available to neighborhood groups; city planners; and local, state, and federal officials and agencies.

The objectives of this report are fourfold: to provide a planning tool for neighborhood and city preservation programs; to serve as an academic and educational resource, useful in the study of local and state history; to encourage economic development through re-use; and to

stimulate civic pride, making residents aware of the historical and visual environment in which they live and encouraging them to take a more positive interest in the future of Providence industrial buildings. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission wishes to thank the following individuals and organizations for their aid in completing *Providence Industrial Sites*: the staff of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, the staff of the Providence Public Library, Ms. Helena Wright of the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, Dr. Patrick Malone of the Slater Mill Historic Site, Mr. Joseph Chrostowski and Ms. Susan A. Chapdelaine of the Providence Archives, the Providence Department of Planning and Urban Development, the Providence Preservation Society, the Providence Tax Assessors Office, and the Providence Recorder of Deeds Office.

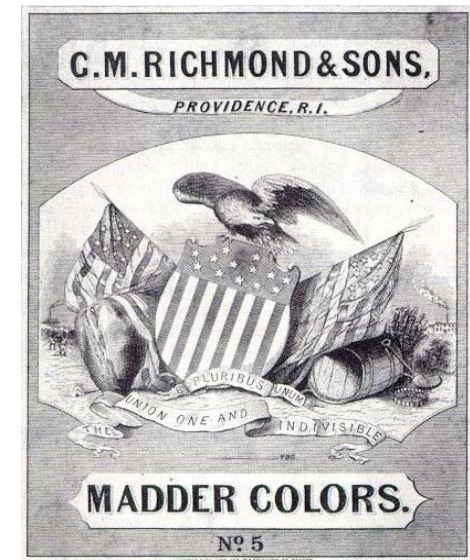


Fig. 1: Textiles label of G.M. Richmond & Sons (later the Woonasquatucket Printworks); 325 Valley Street.





## II. LOCATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

Providence is located at the head of Narragansett Bay. It is 35 miles north from the open ocean, 40 miles southwest of Boston, 157 miles northeast of New York, and covers an irregular area of 18.1 square miles.

Four rivers flow through the city. Two of these, the Moshassuck and the Woonasquatucket, merge to form the Providence River, a tidal arm of Narragansett Bay. In Providence, the Moshassuck River runs a fairly straight course from north to south, while the Woonasquatucket follows a more meandering course in a northwest to southeast direction. The West River runs through the northwestern section of Providence and merges with the Moshassuck near the city's center. The Seekonk River forms the city's eastern boundary.

The Moshassuck and Providence Rivers effectively divide the community into east and west sides. The east side rises steeply forming a spine of hills, to the east of which is the valley of the Seekonk River. The land on the west side of the Providence River forms a shallow basin (the Central Business District). To the west and northwest of the basin, following the Woonasquatucket and West River, the land is characterized by a series of rolling hills and valleys. The southern and southwestern parts of Providence rise at a fairly graduated grade.

Nearly all of the few ponds scattered in the northwestern, western, southwestern, and southern parts of Providence are man made. Mill ponds (formed by damming a river in order to produce waterpower) include Geneva Pond, Whipple's Pond, Upper Canada Pond (formerly Leonard's Pond), and Dyerville Pond. Other bodies of water include Mashpaug Pond (naturally formed), and the man-made lakes of Roger Williams Park.

Major industrial areas in Providence are located along the Woonasquatucket, Moshassuck, and West Rivers, as well as south of the business district on the east and west banks of the Providence River. Smaller industrial districts are found along Eddy Street in South Providence, in the northern section of the West End, in the Mashpaug Pond area of Elmwood, and in the southeastern tip of Fox

Point. Scattered industrial complexes appear in many Providence neighborhoods.

**WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER:** Large, brick, factory complexes—such as those built by Brown and Sharpe and Nicholson File—dominate the eastern end of the Woonasquatucket River Valley, along with some mid-twentieth-century, reinforced-concrete, commercial, and industrial buildings. Some of the structures in this area retain their original use but most have been divided into smaller rental properties.

**OLNEYVILLE:** Olneyville contains some of the city's earliest, most distinctive, and largest textile factories. In the center of Olneyville are two large, late nineteenth-century, brick, textile-mill complexes (the Atlantic Delaine Company Mill and the Riverside Mills), with an earlier, stone, textile mill (with many later additions) nearby. West of Olneyville on the Woonasquatucket River are two of the city's oldest textile mills, built in parts of rural North Providence and Johnston which were later annexed to the city in the late nineteenth century.

**MOSHASSUCK RIVER:** The southern end of the Moshassuck River was the center for the area's earliest mills in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and the location of base-metal works and textile factories in the nineteenth century. Today it contains only a few scattered industrial buildings, such as the Fletcher Building, now used for retail and office space. Further north on the Moshassuck are the few remaining early-and-late nineteenth-century buildings of a textile-printing operation.

**WEST RIVER:** At the southeastern end of the West River is a modern industrial park with two 19th-century complexes—the Corliss Steam Engine Company Works (now heavily altered) and the Providence Tool Company Works, still housing a base-metal operation (in nearly original condition). Farther west along the southern side of the West River is the massive Silver Spring Bleaching and Dyeing Company complex, now subdivided into numerous light industrial and rental units. Originally surrounded by residential and industrial structures, this complex is now adjacent to a highway and a shopping center as well as residential and industrial structures.

**WANSKUCK:** At the northern end of Providence on the West River is Wanskuck Village. Unlike other industrial areas of Providence, this village was a tightly knit residential and industrial community centering entirely on the textile mills owned by the Wanskuck Company on Branch Avenue, Douglas Avenue, and Wild Street. Today this village retains much of its visual unity, although many small companies now occupy the former textile mills.

**JEWELRY DISTRICT:** The jewelry district is southwest of the Central Business District. A residential neighborhood until the mid-nineteenth century, this area emerged in the late nineteenth century as a center for jewelry manufacture. The jewelry district's northern boundary was once Pine Street but is now Interstate 195. With only a few remaining, late nineteenth-century, brick, multi-storied jewelry factories, this area is characterized by large, early twentieth-century, brick, and reinforced-concrete jewelry factories interspersed with one and two-story mid-twentieth-century factories and commercial buildings. These structures have a wide range of uses—from jewelry and other kinds of light manufacturing to commercial and residential.

**POINT STREET:** South of Elm Street, the industrial district becomes more diversified. This area, bordered by the harbor on the east and Interstate 95 on the south (at the north end of Allens Avenue), contains a mixture of one-to-five-story, middle-to-late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century, stone, brick, and reinforced-concrete factories which originally were used for the manufacture of such diverse products as textile machines, knitted goods, rubber products, stoves, jewelry, bakery goods, coal gas, and electricity. This area is now occupied by utilities, light industry, and commercial concerns. This district contains a number of vacant industrial structures.

**HARBOR:** The harbor area south of Globe Street is a mixture of early, middle and late twentieth-century port facilities and natural-gas terminals. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, brick, gas-company buildings still survive at Globe Street, Blackstone Street, and Terminal Road. The early twentieth-century, steel-frame, gas holders at Terminal Road and the handsome brick buildings at the sewage pumping and treatment stations also remain from the earlier stages of the harbor's industrialization.